



# News Release

Public Affairs Office  
PO Box 1306  
Albuquerque, NM 87103  
505/248-6911  
505/248-6915 (Fax)

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**Southwest Region** (Arizona • New Mexico • Oklahoma • Texas) [www.fws.gov/southwest/](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/)

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**Contacts:** Jose Viramontes, 505/248-6404 (o); 505/550-3113 (c); jose\_viramontes@fws.gov

## **Service to Continue to Allow Humane Water Stations on Border Refuge**

Humanitarian efforts will not hamper strides to secure border or protect wildlife.

*Sasabe, AZ* - Humanitarian organizations will be allowed to continue to provide humane water stations on Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge in southern Arizona. After a review of the proposed activity by refuge staff it has been determined that placement of water for use by those in need in the desert will help save lives and is compatible with the purpose of the refuge, which is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In order to minimize environmental impacts, sites throughout the 118,000-acre refuge will be allowed for placement of stationary, 55-gallon water drums adjacent to roadsides and in already disturbed areas. Since 2001, three such sites have been allowed on the refuge.

“Our decision to allow water stations on Buenos Aires was based on a thorough review of different approaches to provide water for humanitarian needs and minimize environmental impacts from each of those approaches,” said Benjamin Tuggle, Southwest Regional Director for the Service.

“Placement of these water stations is yet another tool being used by the refuge to provide life-saving aid to those in need in a manner consistent with our conservation mission.”

The recently completed compatibility determination identifies a responsible balance among the Service’s mission to protect sensitive wildlife habitat, assist in securing our Nation’s borders, and provide potentially life-saving assistance to those in need. Additionally, it provides guidance under which the refuge manager will consider requests by humanitarian organizations for permits to place water on the refuge. Comments by the public, as well as consideration of different approaches for providing humanitarian water, were considered in crafting the compatibility determination.

The refuge’s location along the international border with Mexico within the Altar Valley of southern Arizona provides a unique opportunity to protect remnants of a fragile desert ecosystem and to provide refuge for some of the region’s most imperiled species of plants and wildlife. However, in the past eight years, 25 people are known to have died on refuge lands while trying to cross the desert, where temperatures average in the mid-90s during the summer months. While the number of deaths on the refuge has been steadily declining, the Service recognizes that every death that can be prevented should be prevented.

During the past decade, refuge staff has worked closely with Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to secure the southern border. This has included providing complete access to CBP agents for patrol activities, installation of emergency rescue beacons, and construction of a 15-foot high, 7-mile long pedestrian barrier along the entire southern portion of the Refuge. These measures have not only

substantially decreased the volume of illegal immigrants crossing the refuge, but have also aided in the decline of immigrant deaths on refuge lands. Additionally, the refuge worked closely with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to permit the construction of five towers associated with the Secure Border Initiative.

A copy of the compatibility determination; a question and answer document; and high-resolution images of the refuge, approved 55-gallon water stations and emergency rescue beacons are available at:

<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/arizona/buenosaires/>

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